

In my work, I read a lot of parenting magazines. In just about every issue I find an article about formula versus breastmilk. It's generally presented to women that breastfeeding is a choice, like deciding which sweater to wear on a blustery day, in spite of the fact the AAP, American Academy of Pediatrics, explicitly states that "encouraging breast-feeding among parents is "as important to preventive pediatric health care as promoting immunizations, car seat use, and proper infant sleep position." Now, before you decide that this article does not pertain to you, I implore you to read on and see how a women's choice to not breastfeed not only affects the health of her child, but your pocket book, and your environment as well. I intend to illustrate how compassionate, thinking individuals can no longer stand by quietly and let large corporations deceive and confuse parents into giving their children what's considered fourth best by the World Health Organization (WHO), and also tell you what we can do to make a difference.

According to a 2001 USDA report, "A minimum of \$3.6 billion would be saved if breastfeeding were increased from current levels (64 percent in-hospital, 29 percent at 6 months) to those recommended by the U.S. Surgeon General (75 and 50 percent)." How could that much money possibly be saved just by nursing a baby? In order to understand this you must first understand the health risks to children who are fed artificial milk.

The slogan "breast is best" is no exaggeration. Breastmilk contains 400 nutrients that cannot be recreated in a laboratory, and several studies suggest that breastfeeding reduces the risk of sudden infant death syndrome. Not breastfeeding has been linked to an increased risk of hospitalization, childhood cancer, diarrheal diseases, lower respiratory illness, ear infections, bacterial infections, diabetes, infant botulism Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, and even cavities.

It's not just children that benefit from breastfeeding. Nursing mothers enjoy a reduced risk of premenopausal cancer, ovarian cancer, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoporosis. Breastfeeding is advantageous for people who are outside the mother-baby unit, when you consider healthier babies mean lower health insurance premiums for everyone, and lower absenteeism among working parents. Increased rates of breastfeeding would decrease costs for public health programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

Choosing formula over breastfeeding also impacts our environment on many different levels. Consider the following:

1. The fabrication of artificial baby milk is an inefficient use of land. Each cow used to produce baby formula needs 10,000 square meters of land, which leads to deforestation and soil erosion.
2. The manufacturing of packaging for artificial baby milk creates toxins and uses paper, plastic and tin. For every 3 million bottle-fed babies, 450 million tin cans of formula are consumed. The metal in the tin cans is not recyclable.
3. The manufacturing of artificial baby milk contaminates water. The sewage from dairy cows and fertilizers used to grow feed for cows pollutes rivers and ground waters.
4. The production of artificial baby milk, baby bottles, nipples and other bottle-feeding accessories require a great amount of energy worldwide. Not to mention it takes vast amounts of water used to clean used bottles on a daily basis.

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5. The transportation of the raw materials for the manufacturing of formula and the transportation to and from the store use up precious fuel and create CO2 emissions.

6. Breastfeeding is a natural birth control. Women who are exclusively breastfeeding for the first six months after childbirth have a less than one percent chance of getting pregnant. This helps to control the world's population.

7. Mothers who exclusively breast feed have their menstruation delayed, saving on insurmountable amounts of paper used in sanitary products. The nursing baby uses breast milk efficiently therefore they have fewer diapers. Producing diapers, tampons and pads require fibers, bleaches, packaging, and fuel used in the manufacturing and distribution, especially if cloth alternatives are not used.

Finally, breastmilk is also free and convenient. Something new families should consider when faced with paying a minimum average yearly cost of \$800 per baby if they choose to give their baby artificial milk. I spoke with Lisa Gartin, RN and Lactation Counselor here in Fresno, and she said formula companies have a unique system. Formula companies are largely owned by pharmaceutical companies, formula keeps kids from being as healthy as they could otherwise be, so when these children become ill, they will need other products made by said companies. For example, Abbott Laboratories, aside from making Similac and Isomil, also produces Pediasure, an oral rehydrating solution for infants and young children with diarrheal disease. The company also produces antibiotics widely used to treat infant infections, as well as products for diabetics. So, not only are they manufacturing a product, but that product helps to create a customer base, assured to bring in more business. Speaking of business, the formula industry generates \$6- \$7billion in sales each year, and its executives reap huge profits. The CEO of Bristol-Myers Squibb (makers of Enfamil) earns more than \$13 million per year, and the CEO of Abbott Labs earns more than \$4 million. Part of the reason the industry is so profitable is the fact that every dollar formula makers charge their retail distribution outlets costs them 16 cents on production and delivery. This is big business, and the formula companies don't stop at ad campaigns in parenting magazines, the entire last season of "Chicago Hope" was sponsored by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), whose membership is made up of pharmaceutical companies, including those that manufacture and market infant formula. According to a PhRMA press release, sponsorship of "Chicago Hope" was part of a collaborative effort between Johns Hopkins Medicine, PhRMA, CBS Television stations and 20th Century Fox, "to relate to viewers on medical concerns at a time when their awareness is heightened on such issues." PR Newswire reported in September 1998 that the PhRMA-sponsored episodes would "educate viewers" on "issues such as ... the risks associated with breast-feeding." The episode was entitled "The Breast and the Brightest," the plot revolved around the death of a breast-fed infant due to malnutrition. Woven throughout the episode were inaccurate statements regarding the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) and breast-feeding in general.

What can ordinary people do in the face of billion dollar lobbies? To quote The National Alliance for Breastfeeding Advocacy, "You may think that if you have never lobbied for any issue, your efforts will go unnoticed. However, the power of "one" is strong and when one determined individual networks with others championing similar agendas, change happens." I recommend going to [naba-breastfeeding.org](http://naba-breastfeeding.org), there you can find out more about how to become an advocate for change. For more in depth information go to La Leche Leagues website, [lila.org](http://lila.org), or [breastfeeding.com](http://breastfeeding.com). An entertaining and insightful blog is [thelactivist.blogspot.com](http://thelactivist.blogspot.com).

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